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## Tall Fescue for Trouble Spots

Livestock don't like this new grass too well. It won't take the place of our popular pasture plants. But there's a specialized use for tall fescue on many Iowa farms.

by Virgil B. Hawk

**M**AYBE YOU'VE got "problem areas" on your farm—places where erosion is hard to stop, spots that are normally too wet for growing good pasture.

If so, you'll want to check on a new grass called *tall fescue*. This grass is adapted to Iowa's heavy soils and performs well under wet conditions. It looks like a good bet for:

- Controlling erosion on terrace ridges, lanes and overgrazed areas in brome-alfalfa pastures.
- Protecting waterways and terrace outlets where dense sod, moderate palatability and ability to grow on wet soil are desirable.
- Getting productive pasture on areas that are too poorly drained for smooth brome.

The thing to remember is that in Iowa, tall fescue is for specialized use only. It probably won't be used widely for pasture as it is in the southeastern states and in the Pacific Northwest. And if you have light, sandy soil, you won't have much luck with tall fescue. It just won't persist on that kind of land.

There are two commonly used strains of tall fescue, one called

Kentucky 31 and the other known as Alta. We've tested them both at the Soil Conservation Service Nursery and on Iowa Agricultural Experiment Station farms. Under conditions in this state, there's no marked difference between Kentucky 31 and Alta, though most of our work has been with Alta.

Alta fescue is well suited to wet soils, as is Ioreed canarygrass. Canarygrass is superior in ability to withstand flooding, in control of gully erosion and in yield. But fescue is much easier to establish. And, very important, it produces about four times as much seed as the canarygrass.

Alta fescue has been tested in mixtures with legumes at the SCS Nursery in Ames for more than 5 years. With alfalfa and red clover, on Webster silt loam, it produced excellent yields of hay. And fescue was much more persistent than timothy.

Alta seems to be less competitive than smooth brome with birdsfoot trefoil. Well-balanced mixtures of fescue and trefoil were maintained for 5 years on Clarion silt loam.

### Adapted to Wet Soils

Ladino clover and Alta fescue, both adapted to wet soils, seem to form a good wet-land pasture mix-

ture. Our trials indicate that with clipping, a balanced mixture of these two plants can be maintained.

Because it's only moderately palatable, tall fescue is a logical plant to use on areas where overgrazing is a problem. It's more palatable in early spring and late fall, when the leaves are young and tender. And livestock like the fescue better if it's clipped frequently and heavily fertilized with nitrogen.

### Spring Preferred

Early spring seems to be the best time to seed tall fescue. But you can get good results with *late summer* seedings if the grass is well established before winter sets in. *Fall* seedings usually winterkill.

A seeding rate of 10 pounds per acre is adequate in most cases. But for waterways, this rate should be doubled or tripled (20 to 30 pounds). If you're in a hurry to get a strong, thick turf, use a very heavy rate—between 1 to 2 pounds per 1,000 square feet (45 to 90 pounds per acre).

We're still testing tall fescue. Trials, demonstrations and experiments are going on in all parts of the state. So, before long, we hope to have more news about tall fescue—the grass that may help you take care of trouble spots on your farm.

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